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CHAPTER 15

Pressure group is an organized body with a common interest or a common goal whose main important aim is to put pressure on any governmental institution with the aim of influencing government policies, laws and its decisions for their own advantage. The pressure group is referred to as “The Fundamental Representative”. This is the idea that various pressure groups represent different sectors of the society based on their functions. This is usually done through their occupations or professions.

Anifowose (1999) pressure groups is described as “interest groups, lobby groups or even protest groups”. Pressure groups came into existence to complement, enhance and protect the interest of its members or groups (Oyeleye, 1998). What pressure groups seeks to do or achieve is to ensure that government does their biddings. With the right channels and means, pressure groups are able to make government listen to them. In addition, these groups also influence public policy, administration and even go a long way to determine political structures of the society and forms of government. These groups could be religious, business-like, educational, ethnic-oriented, gender-sensitive, economic and social, among others. There are different pressure groups like ASUU (Academic Staff Union for University), Afenifere, Oodua people’s congress (representing the Yoruba tribe), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) represent the Lawyers and Solicitors, Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) represents the doctor’s interest, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

Pressure group’s existence is to checkmate and make democracy better, to compensate for the tyranny of majority of people in the society. Also, to treat the gaps in the democratic process, to inform debates among ourselves, to encourage participations, and to enhance good accountability in our daily society. Pressure groups are different from political parties. The first distinction is that political parties seek to gain governmental powers while pressure groups seek to influence government decisions and policies. Secondly, Political parties have a wide range of policies while pressure groups narrow it down to their own goals. Pressure groups are not accountable for their actions while political parties are. Also political parties are formally organized than pressure groups. Although their differences, pressure groups and political parties have something in common. Pressure groups may align their interests with that of certain political parties that are believed to possess the capacity to further their interests.

Pressure groups are classified into different types namely Interest groups, Cause groups, Insider and Outsider groups, Anomic groups, Associational and non-associational groups. The Interest Groups are also seen as sectional groups, representing the people in the society. For example, the trade units, CBI (Confederation of British Industries) known as the voice of business in the country, and in Nigeria, Convention on Business Integration (CBI). The Cause Groups are promotion groups which seek to promote certain causes which are; charities and environmental groups. Insider Groups are regularly consulted by the government. Associational Groups are usually registered with appropriate authorities in a State or Country. They have their own registered offices. On the other hand, Non-Associational Groups are groups without a formal organization. Their arrangements and gathering are by virtue of kinship or family attachment, social tradition and so on.

Pressure groups have certain functions which it performs simultaneously;

1. it serves as a link between the government and the people.
2. it promotes public participation in the activities of the government.
3. They serve as sources of information to the government.
4. They ensure that government do not perpetuate themselves in power thereby drifting into a dictatorship.
5. They ensure the interest of the minority are not trampled upon by the government.
6. They act as watchdogs on the government.
7. They are also instrumental in the mounting of pressure on government so that it can implement policies that are to benefit its citizens and they influence legislation.

Political groups adopt different strategies than pressure groups in achieving their aims, goals and objectives including lobbying of elected officials. They might sometimes lobby these government officials through friends, spouses, children and other relatives. Also, pressure groups may sponsor bills in legislative houses and contact legislators to ensure the passage of the bills.